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ABSTRACT

The National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) was formed after a 1986 review of the system for certifying vocational qualifications in the United Kingdom and charged with the task of reforming the existing system. The following are among the NCVQ's major achievements to date: establishment of a framework of achievement levels to which qualifications outside the system can be equated; increased involvement of many professional bodies in the student certification process; shifting of the emphasis in assessment from the theoretical to the practical demonstration of competence; removal of many unnecessary barriers related to course entry; and establishment of the principle that qualifications should be awarded based on standards achieved rather than on completion of specified lengths or types of courses. Despite these improvements, the UK system of awarding vocational qualifications still faces fundamental problems, including the following: the poor quality of some standards on which qualifications are based; delays in exploiting the potential advantages of the unit system to allow transfer between qualifications; a rapid increase in the numbers of awarding bodies and qualifications; and uncertainty about how to foster and assess the knowledge and understanding necessary for successful work performance and subsequent progression. A glossary is appended. (Contains 16 references.) (MN)

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Systems and procedures of certification of qualifications in the United Kingdom

Guildford Educational Services Ltd
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March 1993

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Systems and Procedures of Certification of Qualifications and Competences in the United Kingdom

Contents

Section		Page
1	Introduction and Background	1
2	Legal recognition	11
3	Qualification content	13
4	Entry to courses	16
5	Organisation of Education and Training Courses	19
6	Progression Routes	22
7	Assessment	25
8	Utility and Uses	29
9	Statistics and Trends	31
10	Problems and Issues	34
	Tables	36
Annex A	Bibliography	41
Annex B	Glossary	42

Systems and Procedures of Certification of Qualifications and Competences in the United Kingdom

Paper for CEDEFOP by Guildford Educational Services Ltd

Section 1 - Introduction and Background

Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to describe the systems and procedures used for certification of qualifications and competences in the United Kingdom, to allow comparison with those in other Member States of the European Community. The main emphasis of this paper is on qualifications for vocational education and training below the level of a university degree, although brief reference is also made to academic qualifications both in compulsory secondary education and at university level.

1.2 In the UK the terms 'qualification', 'certificate' and 'diploma' are used rather loosely and are partly interchangeable. In this paper the term 'vocational qualification' will be used to refer to the confirmation that an individual has achieved a range of knowledge, skills and competence (representing either the direct requirements of a single occupation or the background to a range of related occupations). The term 'single subject certificate' will be used to mean confirmation of possession of a narrower range of knowledge or skill - less than that required for competence in an occupation. The term 'award' is used to encompass both qualifications and certificates. (It should be noted, however, that in practice the word 'certificate' may feature in the title of any award.)

1.3 In order to understand the system which is in operation within the United Kingdom, it is necessary to understand something about the role of the different organisations involved in the award of qualifications and also about the structure of education and training within the UK. The purpose of this introductory section is to provide this necessary background. Definitions of the main terms used throughout the paper are given in the glossary attached as Annex B.

Organisations involved in Certification process

1.4 The major organisations involved in the issue of qualifications and certificates in the UK are the awarding bodies (see paragraphs 1.5 - 1.7) and the accrediting bodies (see paragraphs 1.8 - 1.9). Other relevant organisations are the three types of industrial organisations - industrial training boards, industrial training organisations and lead bodies (see paragraphs 1.10 - 1.12), the professional bodies (paragraphs 1.13 - 1.14) and the universities (paragraph 1.15). The organisations concerned with **delivery** of education and training are described in paragraphs 1.40 to 1.42.

1.5 The central players in the certification system are the *awarding bodies* responsible for the award of issue of qualifications and single subject certificates to successful candidates. The awarding bodies guarantee the quality of the assessment on which the award is based, either by setting and marking examinations or by overseeing the assessment undertaken at local level; the awarding body is responsible for issuing the qualifications or certificates which bear its name. There is no legal barrier to prevent any organisation setting themselves up as an awarding body, although there are some limitations on the types and titles of awards which they may confer (see paragraph 2.1). In practice an award will only have credibility if the awarding body is long established and well known (at least to members of the occupation) or if it has status because of its other functions (for example as a professional body) or authority derived from elsewhere (for example from a government initiative).

1.6 Awarding bodies are of a number of different types. In England and Wales there are five major independent awarding bodies concerned with qualifications at Levels 1-4 (as defined in the UK - see paragraph 1.32). They are City and Guilds of London Institute, the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC), the Royal Society of Arts Examinations Board (RSA), the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) and Pitman Examinations Institute (PEI). With the exception of BTEC (formed in 1983 by the merger of two bodies established in the 1970s), these date back to the 19th century. All of them are now non-profit-making but self-financing organisations although their legal status varies - City and Guilds, for example, owes its position to a Royal Charter, whereas BTEC is a company limited by guarantee and is accountable to the Secretary of State who appoints the Council members. PEI, formerly a privately owned company, is now owned by City and Guilds.

1.7 Other organisations combine the function of awarding body with that of a professional body, an industrial training organisation or industrial training board or some other industry based role. There is an increasing trend towards the establishment of joint awarding bodies in which one of the longer established independent organisations is teamed with one or more industry organisations.

1.8 For England, Wales and Northern Ireland the function of *accrediting body* for vocational qualifications is undertaken by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) which was set up by the government in 1986 as a result of the Review of Vocational Qualifications undertaken jointly by the Department of Education and Science and the then Manpower Services Commission. The role of NCVQ is to introduce what is intended to be a simpler and more comprehensive system of vocational qualifications, based on standards defined by industry. National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) can only be awarded for qualifications which have been accredited by NCVQ. Qualifications and the awarding bodies which issue them must fulfil a number of criteria in order to achieve accreditation.

1.9 In Scotland the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC), combines the functions of an awarding body with the accrediting body functions undertaken for England and Wales by NCVQ. Although some relevant organisations, notably the professional bodies, may cover Scotland as well as England and Wales, there are significant differences between the educational systems north and south of the Scottish border. However, the differences in qualifications are diminishing slightly with the introduction of Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) based on standards of industrial competence comparable to those in England and Wales. The majority of SVQs are awarded either by SCOTVEC alone or by SCOTVEC acting in conjunction with another organisation.

1.10 The definition of standards of competence on which NVQs/SVQs are based is undertaken by industry or sector specific *lead bodies* . The lead body for an industry or a category of occupations is designated by the Employment Department which also provides funds to support the development of the standards. Many of the lead bodies are either ITBs or ITOs (see below) but a number are specially created committees representing a variety of interests - this is particularly true of lead bodies for occupations which span a number of sectors of industry and commerce. Lead bodies may act as awarding bodies, either on their own or in conjunction with another organisation.

1.11 *Industrial training boards* were set up by government as the result of the 1964 Industrial Training Act to promote training by levying a financial contribution from companies within a relevant industrial sector and repaying money in the form of grants for training. The system was disbanded for most industries during the 1980s, with the discontinuation of the financial levy/grant system. However, three industrial training boards survive: the Construction Industry Training Board, the Agricultural Training Board and the Engineering Construction Training Board. These also have the function of lead bodies (see above) and a role as partners in joint awarding bodies.

1.12 The former industry training boards (many of them now subdivided into several smaller organisations) now have only voluntary status as *Industry Training Organisations* (ITOs). These have a number of functions including provision of advice on training matters and the organisation of training courses. They also provide a forum for industry-based discussions on training matters and many of them are also lead bodies. A number of ITOs act as awarding bodies, either on their own or in association with one of the independent awarding bodies.

1.13 The *professional bodies* derive their origins from 'learned societies' and from independent and voluntary associations of professionals working in a particular occupation. The original professional bodies adopted a role as awarding bodies because of the lack of technical and scientific university degrees and were restricted to the higher level occupations (ie. 'profession' in the English sense of the word) such as doctors, lawyers, engineers and accounting. The professional bodies now cover a wide range including professions supplementary to medicine, social work, personnel and financial professions, as well as the slightly lower 'technician' occupations.

1.14 There is no single definition of a professional body and some bodies which fall under this category do not have a role as awarding bodies. A fairly common pattern is for the relevant professional body to set the standards of both competence and conduct for the profession and to regulate entry to the profession by acting as an awarding body. In some cases (eg for professions supplementary to medicine) the body has a regulatory function but not a membership; in the majority of cases the professional body also has a membership. For a number of professions the right to limit entry to the profession to qualified members is guaranteed by Royal Charter.

1.15 Universities have the right to award their own degrees and therefore have a role as Higher Education awarding bodies. The range of degree subjects includes vocational subjects (engineering, accountancy), as well as academic ones and some professional bodies recognise relevant degrees in place of part of their own examinations.

Structure of Education and Training

1.16 This sub-section of the paper provides a brief description of the structure of education and training in England and Wales (paragraphs 1.17-1.23)) and in Scotland (paragraph 1.24). A more detailed description is provided in the monograph *Vocational Education and Training in the United Kingdom* published by CEDEFOP.

1.17 Compulsory school education in England and Wales lasts from age 5 to age 16, finishing in the summer of the academic year (1 September to 31 August) in which a pupil has his/her sixteenth birthday. Since 1945, and increasingly from the 1970s, there have been a number of initiatives aimed at increasing the vocational content of secondary education, the most recent being the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative. Such initiatives have generally concentrated on establishing the relevance of general education to the needs of working life or providing background information to enable career choices to be made. Such 'pre-vocational' schemes have not in the main led to recognised vocational awards. The most significant exceptions are in secretarial work where pupils within compulsory secondary education may take a recognised vocational award (usually less than a full qualification).

1.18 The main examination at the end of compulsory secondary education (aged 16) is the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). The requirements of the relatively new National Curriculum for compulsory education mean that pupils normally study up to ten subjects in addition to physical education but few take GCSE in as many as ten subjects. Passes at grade C or above in 5 GCSE subjects are normally required for progression on the more academic route to 'A' levels (see paragraph 1.19 below), with passes in 4 subjects giving entry to the more vocationally slanted equivalent. In 1988-9 approximately 36% of school leavers held five or more passes at this level, but the trend since then has been for this percentage to increase.

1.19 Options for young people at age 16-18 are mainly as follows:

- continuing on the academic route to take GCE Advanced examinations (A levels) which are normally taken in two or three subjects at the end of a further two years of study. Depending partly upon the local organisation of 16+ education, students may study for A levels within the school in which they completed their compulsory education, in a separate 'Sixth Form College' (which mainly concentrates on academic subjects) or in a college of further education (in which both academic and vocational subjects are available)

- continuing in full time education but following a more vocational route, often within a college of further education; this usually involves study for a broad vocational qualification, either the new GNVQs (see paragraph 1.31) or the older BTEC courses (see paragraph 1.34) but may occasionally be more practical and occupationally specific (courses in catering and hairdressing are examples)

- training (most commonly the government funded Youth Training programme), preparing for a vocational qualification, sometimes with one day per week studying at a further education college

- employment with or without training on the job and with, or (more often) without, day release to college to study for a vocational or academic qualification.

1.20 Since the high youth unemployment levels of the 1970s and the great increase in government intervention in training programmes for 16-year-old school leavers, the traditional system of apprenticeships has virtually collapsed.

1.21 Options available to young people who wish to continue their education and training post-18 fall into the following main categories:

- university attendance to obtain a degree in an academic subject, normally requiring 3 or 4 years of study
- study at a university for a more vocationally related degree, over 3 or 4 years, often including a period of relevant workplace experience (the former polytechnics have now all attained the status of universities but retain their more vocational emphasis)
- study for an alternative higher education qualification (eg a BTEC Higher National Diploma), usually involving 2 years of full time study which may be at a college of technology
- part time study or self study leading to a Higher National Certificate, a professional qualification or some other higher level qualification
- part time or evening study leading to completion of a vocational qualification or to an advanced vocational qualification

1.22 The available options at 18+ will depend very largely on students' entry qualifications. Entry to a degree course requires a minimum of two passes at GCE A level and more usually three passes. Entry to other higher education courses requires one or two A level passes. Increasingly, however, vocational alternatives to the traditional academic entry qualifications are being accepted (see Section 6) and routes to higher education via 'access courses' are available to adults with few formal qualifications (see paragraph 4.16.

1.23 There is a wide variety of courses of continuing education and adult updating available within the UK. Courses may be offered within the public sector (universities and colleges) or in private colleges or indeed provided by companies. Many such courses are of a very short duration, very specific in content and leading to no formal award. Some, however, lead to recognised qualifications, for example in supervision or management, and others to nationally awarded certificates.

Scotland

1.24 The main aspects in which Scotland's system of education and training differs from that in England and Wales are:

- transition to secondary education normally takes place at age 12 (in England and Wales transition is normally at 11, although sometimes at 12)
- at the end of compulsory secondary education the examination taken is the Scottish Standard Grade Certificate
- after compulsory education, pupils following a more academic route take one year courses leading to the Scottish Certificate Examination at Higher Grade (normally in 5 subjects) which gives entry to higher education

- an increasing number of pupils now spend an additional year at school to take the Certificate of Sixth Year Studies and further Higher grade subjects

- as an alternative to Higher Grades or in addition to Higher Grades, many pupils take one or more modules from the Scottish National Certificate which is also available to young people in work or in training programmes and to adults

- within the National Certificate, any number of modules from the 2,700 available may be taken in any combination, although certain groupings of modules are recognised for specific purposes.

- until the advent of SVQs and gSVQs the Scottish National Certificate system provided for virtually all vocational education below higher education level in Scotland; SVQs are normally packaged in the form of National Certificate modules or of 'workplace assessed' modules

Northern Ireland

1.25 The main features of the certification and accreditation system in Northern Ireland are substantially the same as in England and Wales. The content of the qualifications devised under the NVQ system are normally the same in Northern Ireland as in England and Wales, but Northern Ireland has separate Industrial Training Organisations and in some cases certification bodies in Northern Ireland include regional employers' organisations.

Other regional and linguistic differences

1.26 Other than the differences noted above, there are no significant regional differences in the structure of education and training or the certification procedures. A number of organisations have networks of regional branches or regional advisory bodies but these all operate within the same framework. The former Regional Examining Bodies no longer act as separate awarding bodies.

1.27 Linguistic differences have not been a major issue within vocational education and training within the UK in the past. There is, however, an increasing demand for assessment to be made available in other languages (eg Welsh, Scottish Gaelic and Asian languages) in some NVQs/SVQs and this is sometimes permitted. There are also a small number of older-style qualifications, for example for bilingual secretaries, available in Welsh and/or in Scottish Gaelic. City and Guilds co-operates with the Welsh Joint Education Council in offering joint and bilingual certification.

NVQs and SVQs

1.28 The qualification system within the United Kingdom is in transition at the present time (March 1993). The target of accrediting NVQs and SVQs to meet the needs of 80% of the work force at NVQ/SVQ levels 1-4 by the end of 1992 has been achieved, but some of these qualifications have only recently been published. There remain a substantial number of older style qualifications many of which will be replaced in due course by either general or occupational NVQs/SVQs. In describing the situation as a whole, this paper will describe the NVQs and SVQs as the 'bench mark' and then describe the ways in which other qualifications differ from them.

1.29 The key features of NVQs and SVQs are that:

- they are intended to attest to full competence in an occupation
- they are based on standards of competence defined by industry through the work of the lead bodies
- they are divided into units which can be gained individually and the complete qualification can be built up gradually by 'credit accumulation'
- they emphasise the standard of competence achieved at the stage when the candidate is assessed rather than the education or training process by which he/she achieves that competence
- hence they are not limited to one particular programme or duration of education and training and may, indeed, be achieved by candidates with relevant knowledge and experience who have not followed a formal training programme
- they put high emphasis on the demonstration of competence in the workplace although there is an increasing recognition that they also need to assess the candidate's underpinning knowledge and understanding, particularly at higher levels,
- there is a marked emphasis on assessment by observation in the workplace rather than by written examinations, although examinations are not excluded
- they are intended to be free from discrimination (for example on grounds of race and gender) and should have no *unnecessary* barriers to access or progression.

1.30 It should be noted, however, that some of these objectives have proved difficult to implement in practice or to reconcile with one another. For example, the emphasis on work-based assessment presents difficulties for candidates who are not in suitable employment or whose employers are not willing to make suitable arrangements for assessment.

1.31 When the relevant lead body has defined the standards for an occupation within its scope, any awarding body may apply to NCVQ for accreditation of NVQs based on these standards. For some occupations there are five or more awarding bodies. NCVQ's conditions of accreditation include that there should be evidence of quality control and of an equal opportunities policy.

1.32 The qualifications accredited as NVQs and SVQs are allocated a place in a 'framework' in which there are two dimensions, one describing the occupational area of the qualification and other the level. The scale of levels is not precisely similar to that used by the European Commission, for example UK level 1 does not have a parallel in Europe and UK level 2 approximates to EC level 1. The definitions of levels for NVQs and SVQs are as follows:

Level 1 - competence in the performance of a range of varied work activities, most of which may be routine and predictable

Level 2 - competence in a significant range of varied work activities, performed in a variety of contexts. Some of the activities are complex or non-routine, and there is some individual responsibility or autonomy. Collaboration with others, perhaps through membership of a work group or team, may often be a requirement

Level 3 - competence in a broad range of varied work activities performed in a wide variety of contexts and most of which are complex and non-routine. There is considerable responsibility and autonomy, and control or guidance of others is often required

Level 4 - competence in a broad range of complex, technical or professional work activities performed in a wide variety of contexts and with a substantial degree of personal responsibility and autonomy. Responsibility for the work of others and the allocation of resources is often present

Level 5 - competence which involves the application of a significant range of fundamental principles and complex techniques across a wide and often unpredictable variety of contexts. Very substantial personal autonomy and often significant responsibility for the work of others and for the allocation of substantial resources feature strongly, as do personal accountabilities for analysis and diagnosis, design, planning, execution and evaluation.

GNVQs and gSVQs

1.33 In recognition of the problems of delivering and assessing NVQs and SVQs for candidates who are not in employment, as well as in a desire to establish a vocational route to higher education, the Government White Paper *Education and Training for the 21st Century* (May 1991) announced the introduction of General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) and General Scottish Vocational Qualifications (gSVQs). Initially these have been developed at levels 2 and 3 in a limited range of occupational areas but a wider range of occupational areas is becoming available, with further extension to levels 1 and 4 planned. The first pilot scheme for these new qualifications began in September 1992 and they will become more widely available from September 1993. GNVQs and gSVQs are intended to provide a broader education and training than is available through occupational NVQs/SVQs, with each qualification relating to a wider range of occupations. They place more emphasis on the understanding of underlying principles than the occupational NVQs/SVQs. There are no restrictions on course organisation, and although the initial aim is to meet the needs of full-time post-16 education it is expected that they will be available by other routes in the future.

Other types of Vocational Qualification

1.34 This sub-section gives a brief summary of other types of vocational qualification still available within the United Kingdom. Subsequent sections of this paper will describe the different types of qualification in more detail.

1.35 The division of higher education into universities and polytechnics, both awarding degrees based on three of four-year programmes, has now disappeared. As a result of legislation based on the 1991 White Paper *Higher Education: a New Framework*, polytechnics were given the right to seek full university status and all now have had it conferred. One of the rights conferred by full university status is for the institution to award its own degrees without external supervision. Previously, degrees at polytechnics and certain other higher education institutions were guaranteed by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), now disbanded. More detailed consideration of university degrees is outside the scope of this paper.

1.36 Other vocational qualifications available within the UK fall mainly into the following categories:

- qualifications awarded by the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) normally taken by post-16 students at colleges of further or higher education either full-time or part-time; BTEC qualifications are at three main levels (First, National and Higher National), with additional modules available as continuing education subjects for adults; it is expected that the existing BTEC system will in future be replaced by GNVQs

- non-BTEC Higher Education diplomas awarded by the individual college/institution or operated in conjunction with the qualifications of a professional body

- qualifications of professional bodies which may be either higher education or below higher education in level; these are normally under the control of the individual professional body although credit may be given for success in some other qualifications, for example, BTEC

- a wide range of other qualifications below higher education, many of them awarded by the major independent awarding bodies (City and Guilds, RSA, LCCI and PEI) but with many other awarding bodies offering one or two qualifications each. Most of these have traditionally been less closely linked to college attendance for school leavers than have BTEC qualifications. In theory, all these qualifications should eventually be superseded by NVQs.

1.37 In addition to qualifications based on the full range of skills required to practise an occupation, there are also a large number of 'single subject certificates' which are narrower and more specific. These may be designed to provide evidence of the acquisition of additional skills and knowledge, including those required by adults. Examples are certificates in Word Processing for those who already hold secretarial qualifications, certificates in the use of Computer Numerical Control (CNC) of Machine Tools, normally taken by those who already have qualifications or experience in engineering, and certificates in Food Hygiene which are being increasingly required for workers in food retailing and catering occupations.

1.38 Individual NVQ and GNVQ units offer a similar opportunity for adults to extend their existing knowledge and skills. Achievement of one or more individual units is recognised by the award of a 'Record of Achievement'.

1.39 In Scotland, SCOTVEC offers National Certificates (see paragraph 1.24), Higher National Certificates and Diplomas, Post experience and Post graduate Diplomas and Tailored Awards to meet the needs of individual companies and organisations.

Organisations delivering Vocational Education and Training

1.40 This final sub-section on the background to certification procedures summarises the types of organisation in which vocational education and training may be delivered. These are as follows:

- colleges of further education and similar institutions with a variety of slightly different names; these are publicly funded institutions offering a wide range of technical and business subjects mainly through formal programmes but increasingly with the use of flexible delivery methods and open learning

- Institutes of Higher Education and Universities (especially the former Polytechnics); these are publicly funded institutions offering degrees, Higher National Certificates/Diplomas and other higher level qualifications

- trainers and managing agents for the government funded Youth Training (YT) and Training for Work (TFW) programmes; these may be profit-making private companies or may have charitable status; they receive funding for trainees on YT and TFW programmes, based on student numbers and success rates (Note: Training for Work replaced the Employment Training (ET) programme in late 1992)

- private sector training colleges relying on fees paid by individuals; these account for only a small proportion of training but are prominent in some occupational areas such as computing and secretarial work

- companies and public sector employers who may provide training either from their own resources or in conjunction with a government funded programme such as YT

- schools and sixth form colleges; as already noted, these provide only a very small proportion of vocational education and training but they are increasingly working in partnership with colleges of further education.

1.41 The organisations listed in the previous paragraph are those which have the major role in the education and training of young people and of adults re-training for an entirely different occupation. Continuing education and adult updating for adults already in work also takes place in a variety of institutions including in-company, private training organisations and publicly funded colleges and universities. Many of the adult updating courses offered by publicly funded institutions are run on a 'full cost recovery' basis in which the charge made for the course is intended to cover both direct costs and the appropriate proportion of overheads.

1.42 Funding of higher education institutions is administered by the Higher Education Funding Council and by SHEFC in Scotland. As from April 1993 funding of further education colleges and of sixth form colleges will be taken out of the control of Local Education Authorities and administered centrally through the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and by SOED in Scotland. Funding for Youth Training and Employment Training programmes is channelled through the local Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs; lecs in Scotland). Imposition of conditions for funding is one of the methods by which the government can play some role in the control of the qualification and certification process (see paragraph 2.6 below).

Section 2 - Legal Recognition

Introduction

2.1 Legal responsibility for qualifications over the whole range of vocational education and training in the UK is not clearly defined. As has already been noted, any organisation can become an awarding body and issue certificates or qualifications and the government has not taken any power (except in the case of degrees) to control this. However, controls are exercised through the NVQ/SVQ system and through the allocation of funds to trainees. Some types of qualification have a legal basis, in particular:

- the right to award degrees forms part of the charter of a university and may not be claimed by another organisation

- the right to set standards for the profession, including awarding qualifications and restricting membership to suitably qualified people, normally forms part of the charter awarded to professional bodies or (if they do not have a charter) forms part of their articles of association

- the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine which supervises the regulatory functions of seven professional boards was appointed by Act of Parliament

- NVQs/GNVQs and SVQs/gSVQs may only be awarded for qualifications accredited by the appropriate body (NCVQ or SCOTVEC) and accreditation depends on adherence to the NVQ/SVQ criteria.

2.2 Both NCVQ and SCOTVEC were established by the government, and are monitored by government but have a degree of autonomy. The intention that both organisations should become self-financing weakens the effectiveness of government control.

2.3 In addition to the legal basis of some professional qualifications as outlined in paragraph 2.1, some other individual qualifications may have a legal status in that they are requirements for the pursuit of certain occupations; examples are the qualifications of the Mining Qualifications Board and the requirements for sea-going personnel.

2.4 More restricted certificates of competence are necessary for the pursuit of certain other occupations (for example bus drivers and heavy goods vehicle drivers) and for the carrying out of certain tasks (for example, pesticides application). There is an increasing trend for legislation relating to Health and Safety at work to require evidence of training and competence in the form of suitable certificates, but these are 'single subject certificates' (related to fairly narrow tasks) rather than full qualifications.

2.5 Other types of recognition of qualifications, including mutual recognition across the EC, are discussed in Section 8 'Utility and uses'.

Government Control through Funding

2.6 Because the introduction of the NVQ/SVQ system is a major part of the government's strategy for improving standards of industrial training and competence, control of funding mechanisms is being used to ensure that the majority of vocational training and education is related to these qualifications as well as to further other government aims:

- within the school system, courses of secondary education must lead either to GCSE examinations (or Standard Grade in Scotland) or to one of a restricted number of alternative qualifications; for England and Wales these are defined on a list drawn up by the government-funded Secondary Examinations and Assessment Council (SEAC).

- section 24 of the 1988 Education Reform Act for England and Wales allows the government to establish a similar list of qualifications which may be offered in further education colleges to pupils between the ages of 16 and 18. It is expected that this provision will be implemented from April 1993 and will increase the pace of the move to NVQs and GNVQs.

- funding for trainees on Youth Training and Training for Work programmes is largely restricted (except for trainees with special needs) to programmes leading to NVQs or SVQs.

- provision introduced from April 1992 to give Income Tax relief to individuals paying for their own training is restricted to courses leading to NVQs/SVQs or NVQ/SVQ units.

2.7 There are inevitably some exceptions to these general rules, as there are still a number of occupations for which no suitable NVQ/SVQ currently exists. The funding restrictions do not affect courses offered on a cost recovery basis by colleges or courses at any private organisation which is not government funded.

2.8 At higher education level, institutions have a rather greater freedom in what they can provide Even here, however, there is some financial control in that local education authorities must provide grants for students following degree courses and some other designated courses, but grants for all other courses are at their discretion.

Summary of Legal Recognition

2.9 In conclusion, the legal basis for recognition of qualifications within the UK is extremely diverse and the system as a whole relies on a variety of constraints which have no strong legal basis.

Section 3 - Qualification Content

Introduction

3.1 In this section and in subsequent sections of the paper, separate descriptions are required for the different types of qualification available in the UK. In each section, the NVQ/SVQ system will be described first, followed by an explanation of any differences for other types of qualification.

3.2 In general, it may be assumed that the content of the course is broadly the same as the content on which the assessment is based. Over the years there have been a number of attempts to make course content broader than the scope of the assessment, for example the requirements that courses for 16-18 year olds should include 'General Studies'. In practice, anything which is not assessed or clearly required for the certificate tends to be ignored. Colleges may, however, need to provide extra lessons in basic skills such as communication and numeracy if the students do not have a sufficient level of skill to cope with the technical content of the course.

NVQs and SVQs

3.3 The content of NVQs and SVQs is described in the 'Standards of Competence' defined by the lead body designated for this purpose by the Employment Department (see paragraph 1.10). Guidance from the Employment Department now provides for lead bodies to include representatives of interested parties including relevant trade unions.

3.4 Because the philosophy of NVQs/SVQs is that they should be based on standards defined by industry, there is now less role in the development process for the colleges or training organisations which will be required to deliver education and training. There is also no formal role for the awarding body, although it is now usual for lead bodies to involve their chosen awarding body in consultations at an early stage. Initially the system provoked complaints from awarding bodies that they were expected to provide assessment and certification for a syllabus over which they had no control.

3.5 The guidance literature produced by NCVQ and the Employment Department requires lead bodies to conduct trials based on their draft standards before they are fully implemented. As the system develops, better mechanisms are being established to ensure feed-back from awarding bodies, colleges and training organisations to the lead body responsible for the standards.

GNVQs and gSVQs

3.6 The standards on which the first national pilot GNVQs are based were developed by NCVQ in consultation with a number of organisations including the three awarding bodies (BTEC, City & Guilds and RSA) who are conducting the pilot phase.

3.7 The next group of GNVQs are being developed by individual awarding bodies working under contracts from NCVQ. Optional GNVQ units are also developed by the individual awarding bodies, subject to NCVQ accreditation.

3.8 General Scottish Vocational Qualifications (gSVQs) although intended as the Scottish equivalent of GNVQs, differ from GNVQs in some respects. The content of gSVQs is defined by SCOTVEC and is based on modules from the existing National Certificate catalogue. This allows common ground between the different systems to be identified and exploited.

Professional Bodies

3.9 Syllabuses for professional body examinations are drawn up by the professional body itself or by a special sub-committee. The requirements of a professional body may also influence the contents of university degrees in the same subject area, since students following a degree programme will wish to obtain as much credit as possible towards the requirements of the professional body.

Independent Awarding Bodies

3.10 For NVQs and GNVQs, the independent awarding bodies use the qualification content defined in the national standards but have committees to advise on their implementation. For non-NVQs each awarding body has its own procedures and committee structures, although these may change as the older qualifications are superseded. The committees provide advice to the awarding body and a forum for discussion. The normal procedure is for decisions to be made by a vote in committee; no organisation represented has the power of veto.

3.11 BTEC has a series of committees, with policy issues determined by the Council itself and with more detailed work delegated to cross sector committees (covering product development and quality assurance) and to a series of advisory boards for different occupational areas. These committees contain representatives of education, industry and commerce as well as representatives of government departments (Employment Department, Department for Education and others).

3.12 The overall structure of each BTEC qualification and the titles of the mandatory units are decided by the appropriate advisory board, subject to approval by the Council. For the majority of qualifications at First and National level, the content of the mandatory units is specified in detail by the advisory board and there are usually a range of BTEC-devised optional units. Individual colleges decide on the content of the programme which they will offer, in accordance with the structure defined by BTEC and the requirements of local industry. Colleges may devise their own optional units, subject to BTEC approval.

3.13 The pattern is similar for Higher National Certificates and Diplomas but at this level colleges have more freedom to devise their own programmes and there are fewer BTEC devised units. Both at Higher National level and at lower levels, qualifications which attract candidates from only a small number of colleges may be based on content entirely devised by the colleges, subject to BTEC approval.

3.14 City and Guilds has a committee structure similar to that of BTEC, with overall policy determined by a policy committee and with national advisory committees and sub-committees for individual groups of subjects. The committees include representatives from colleges, employers, trade unions and government departments.

3.15 The majority of the most important City and Guilds schemes are based on syllabuses devised centrally through the committee structure although many also include an option for college devised syllabuses at Part III level. City and Guilds will also consider applications from individual colleges or employers for new schemes to meet new needs and there are large numbers of special schemes available for individual organisations.

3.16 RSA, LCCI and PEI operate with similar committee structures to those of City and Guilds. In general, smaller awarding bodies have a less formalised system but would nevertheless take account of the views of relevant organisations.

Scotland

3.17 Like NVQs, SVQs are, as has already been noted, based on industry-defined standards but these are 'packaged' either into National Certificate or into Workplace Assessed units. Other vocational qualifications awarded by SCOTVEC, including National Certificate modules and Higher National awards, are based on content defined by SCOTVEC itself, through its committee structure and in consultation with user bodies.

Section 4 - Entry to courses

Introduction

4.1 Led by NCVQ and related initiatives, there is a very strong policy trend in the UK to remove unnecessary barriers to the entry to courses leading to qualifications. Where entry qualifications are recommended it is therefore common for alternatives to be accepted, so as to offer the widest possible opportunity for people to make progression. Emphasis is on the background knowledge and skills which are needed for successful participation in the course. Entry for adults is normally on similar conditions as for school leavers except that experience may be accepted in place of formal qualifications.

4.2 Conversely, however, there is a trend at higher levels to increase the level of academic qualification required for entry to the professions. For example, entry to Chartered Engineer status (previously available via part-time study) became largely restricted to graduates from the early 1970s. Similarly, entry to the Accountancy professions is increasingly drawn from university graduates.

4.3 Many awarding bodies set entry qualifications which are advisory rather than mandatory. Colleges offering courses may vary the requirements according to their own experience of teaching the course and according to the demand for places. In practice some colleges admit candidates with entry qualifications below the recommended minimum while others are less flexible than awarding bodies' regulations permit.

4.4 Although the general trend is towards greater openness, the details vary with the types of qualification as described in the following paragraphs.

NVQs and SVQs

4.5 The policy of both NCVQ and SCOTVEC is that there should be no unnecessary barriers to the entry qualifications. It is therefore rare for any recommendations to be made as to the academic qualifications for entry to an NVQ or SVQ course or assessment. It should also be noted that attendance at a course of study is not necessary for entry to assessment for NVQs/SVQs.

4.6 Individual NVQs or SVQs may occasionally have entry restrictions based on legal or other practical constraints. For example, persons with certain medical conditions are barred from entry to certain food handling occupations and those who are colour-blind are barred from occupations (including some in the electrical and electronic industry) where good colour vision is essential.

4.7 NVQs and SVQs do, however, presuppose that candidates will be able to obtain suitable occupational experience and access to assessment opportunities in a real or simulated workplace environment.

GNVQs and gSVQs

4.8 For GNVQs and gSVQs, the policy is that there should be a similar openness of access opportunities. No specific entry qualifications are defined. However, colleges are likely to assess potential entrants in the light of the intention that GNVQs at level 3 should provide a route to higher education.

Professional Bodies

4.9 Entry to courses linked to the qualifications for professional bodies are more tightly regulated than for those of most other vocational qualifications below degree level. For many professional bodies the standard entry level is a pass in two subjects at GCE A Level (or the Scottish equivalent) and this applies whatever method of study the student is undertaking. In addition, it is often a requirement that the student should become a student member of the appropriate body before studying for the qualification and attempting the examinations. Requirements do, however, vary and many professional bodies will accept alternative qualifications (including vocational qualifications) in place of two A levels or will relax requirements for mature students.

Independent Awarding Bodies

4.10 The primary requirement for entry to a BTEC course is 'the capacity to benefit from the course' and suggested entry qualifications are not mandatory. For entry to First courses the only recommendation is a minimum age of 16. For entry to National Courses the recommended entry level is success in four subjects at grades A to C of GCSE or a BTEC First award or an appropriate equivalent. For some subjects there may also be a recommended minimum standard in Mathematics or English.

4.11 For BTEC Higher National courses the normal minimum entry requirement is either a BTEC National award in a related subject or a pass in one subject at GCE A Level plus 'supporting GCSE passes'. Again, however, alternatives are accepted.

4.12 City and Guilds, RSA, LCCI and PEI very rarely impose strict entry qualifications and indeed many courses have no recommended entry qualifications. Although the majority of students progress through the different levels of qualification within one subject, taking Part I before Part II, possibilities exist for candidates who have alternative qualifications or experience to move directly to Part II or to Part III.

4.13 For the smaller awarding bodies the pattern is more diverse and entry qualifications (typically GCSE passes) are more likely to be specified.

Scotland

4.14 No formal qualifications are required for entry to National Certificate courses. SCOTVEC has, however, introduced two lower level courses (Skillstart 1 and Skillstart 2) to cater for the needs of those with moderate learning difficulties or for adult returners with few formal qualifications and low self confidence. Candidates successful in these Skillstart courses can then progress to National Certificate modules or gSVQs. Entry to SCOTVEC Higher National Certificate and Diplomas is normally from a suitable programme of National Certificate modules or by direct entry from more academic routes, for example from the Scottish Certificate of Education at Higher grade.

Accreditation of Prior Learning

4.15 During the 1980s there was an increasing interest in the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), strongly supported by the Employment Department. Although APL could be regarded as an alternative assessment method, it is considered at this point because of its relevance to course organisation and entry requirements.

4.16 Interest in APL was originally stimulated by developments in the United States and directed to arrangements for allowing mature students without formal qualifications to gain entry to higher education. The APL process for this purpose concentrated on identifying knowledge and skills acquired through employment or other life roles. A related development was the rise in 'Access' courses preparing mature students for entry to university.

4.17 During the mid-1980s, the Employment Department began to sponsor projects which experimented with the use of APL as a means of enabling mature students to gain vocational qualifications or credit towards such qualifications. This initiative has now been broadened and many of the local TECs (Training and Enterprise Councils) or, in Scotland, lecs (Local Enterprise Companies) have set up APL services under the title Access to Assessment. The APL procedure offers an alternative to the formal route of course-plus-examination and involves the collection of a portfolio of evidence of the candidate's knowledge and competence. With the decline in formal examinations within the NVQ/SVQ system, the APL process tends to merge with the normal assessment procedures for other types of candidate for these awards. Colleges operating APL have found that it can be very expensive and time consuming to provide this service and are experimenting with means of making the procedure more cost effective.

4.18 Experience with APL has shown that many candidates require additional skills and knowledge to complete the requirements for a qualification. Colleges are therefore increasingly offering 'top up training' in conjunction with APL, and seeking to reorganise courses in a more flexible manner to meet the needs of this type of candidate.

4.19 In early 1992 the Government adopted the National Training Targets originally put forward by the Confederation of British Industry. In addition to targets for the qualification levels to be achieved by young people entering employment, these include the aim that 50% of the whole of the employed workforce should be qualified to NVQ Level 3 or above by the year 2000. Achievement of this target is likely to rely on the the extensive use of APL. If APL plus top-up training are adopted on as wide a scale as the National Training Targets would imply, this would indeed lead to a significant improvement in the level of skills in the working population.

Section 5 - Organisation of Education and Training Courses

Introduction

5.1 The tradition within the United Kingdom has been for vocational qualifications to be available through a variety of routes, including full time college attendance, block release, day release, evening classes, some correspondence courses or self-study and (more recently) open and flexible learning. Each individual qualification has been available via one or more possible modes of study depending on the policies of the awarding body (as described later in this section) and on the needs of the occupation By tradition, some occupational areas have relied more than others on full-time study (for example Catering) or on block release (for example Construction).

5.2 A study undertaken for the Further Education Unit in 1989 and based on enrolment statistics collected by the Department for Education (see paragraphs 9.5 to 9.8) showed that enrolments to the first year of courses at colleges of further education were mainly divided between evening classes (37%), part-time day (34%) and full-time (24%) with only very small proportions on block release courses (4%) and open learning (1%). These figures include students following programmes of general and academic education and if such students are excluded the proportion of students on part-time day courses rises to 41%. These figures mask differences between occupational areas and between age groups, with evening attendance being much more popular amongst the over 25 age group.

5.3 The current trend is for greater flexibility in modes of attendance, more use of alternative modes and of flexible learning and greater recognition that not all students need to follow a course of study of the standard length. Policy objectives are sometimes limited in practice by the facilities which colleges are able to offer. It is clearly impracticable for every college to offer every course by several different modes of study and not all colleges are able to make provision for accelerated progress for students who already have some of the necessary skills and knowledge. In general, however, college flexibility is increasing.

NVQs and SVQs

5.4 The policy is that NVQs and SVQs should be accessible to candidates irrespective of their method of study or of the length of the course. Thus, course length is rarely specified and any suggestions which are made are intended only as a guide. Assessment is also available to candidates who have not followed a course. In practice, because of the strong emphasis on competence in the workplace, preparation for NVQs/SVQs which is organised by a training provider or college needs to offer periods of work experience. Alternatively, courses may be organised on a part-time basis for students who are in relevant employment.

5.5 NVQs and SVQs may be attained by study or training undertaken in the workplace and both Employment Department and TECs are actively encouraging employers to become involved in the provision of NVQs. In practice, it is only the larger employers who are likely to be able to make adequate provision for training and assessment Some colleges are able to offer a service to employers which includes APL and top up training, possibly delivered on the employer's premises.

5.6 The UK already has considerable experience in the use of open learning in both academic and vocational studies and open learning is now being used for NVQs/SVQs. There is a significant trend to the production of open learning materials specifically designed to meet the requirements of NVQs/SVQs, at least for the more popular subject areas, and the Employment Department is sponsoring projects to 'map' the relevance of existing open learning materials to NVQs/SVQs. However, because of the requirement for workplace assessment in NVQs/SVQs, open learning is most suitable for the more mature and self-motivated students or for those who have workplace support from employers or supervisors.

GNVQs and gSVQs

5.7 GNVQs and gSVQs are being offered initially for young people on full-time courses and include periods of work experience. There is, however, no obligation to offer courses by this method and it is expected that part-time courses will also become available as GNVQs/gSVQs become established. Assessment without course attendance will also be a possibility.

Professional Bodies

5.8 Depending on the individual awarding body, courses leading to professional body qualifications may be organised full-time (often in association with a higher education diploma or degree), on day release, by evening classes or by formal or informal self-study. For many individual qualifications more than one of these possibilities is available.

Independent Awarding Bodies

5.9 Until now, the pattern for BTEC awards has been that First awards were based on one year courses, National awards on two year courses and Higher National awards also on two year courses. At each level the Certificate (for example First Certificate) was based on part-time study and the Diploma on full-time study, including work experience, but students were also able to gain a Diploma by studying part-time over a longer period. Part-time study was most often by day release but occasionally by block release.

5.10 BTEC is in the process of adapting its policies to bring them more into line with NCVQ requirements. It is expected that its existing provision will, in due course, be replaced by GNVQs, available by either full-time or part-time study and with no requirement that courses should extend over a specified length of time. BTEC has also been increasing the flexibility of its requirements so as to make it easier for colleges to offer open learning courses leading to these qualifications, and also accepts the idea of assessment without course attendance in appropriate circumstances.

5.11 BTEC courses nearly all have a modular structure and there is provision for students to take individual modules and to receive a 'record of achievement' recognising their success. In general, however, this facility has not been widely used and the majority of college courses are organised on the traditional pattern to cater for the needs of younger trainees.

5.12 The regulations for most qualifications available from other independent awarding bodies have traditionally allowed courses to be offered on either a full-time or a part-time basis according to the decision of the individual college. Some occupational areas have traditionally favoured one mode of attendance in preference to others. Where full time courses have been offered they have frequently included periods of work experience.

5.13 Open learning and self-study are available options for many qualifications but where qualifications are more practically based and include a requirement for the completion of practical assignments or similar, it is more difficult for candidates to acquire them by open learning. However, there has been a small but increasing trend for colleges to provide flexible course structures which combine self-study with practical training and assessment. Some individual certificates (for example in secretarial and office subjects) have traditionally been available to all candidates, irrespective of course attendance.

Scotland

5.14 The Scottish National Certificate was initially aimed primarily at colleges and YT schemes but is now well established in schools and has gradually become available in a limited number of employer organisations. In Scotland there has been much greater use of the flexibility provided by a modular system and it is much more common for individual National Certificate modules to be taken in conjunction with other courses (for example, academic qualifications) or by adults updating or extending their skills.

5.15 SCOTVEC has recently revised its Higher National Certificates and Diplomas; new courses have been introduced in three annual batches with enrolment to the final batch beginning in September 1992. The older courses had a unified structure with examinations at the end of the course. The revised courses have a modular structure and although most candidates will still study for the same length of time overall, there is much more flexibility.

5.16 Because of the relatively scattered population in large areas of Scotland, there is an obvious market for open learning and Scotland was one of the first parts of the UK to take up open learning with enthusiasm. However, only a very small proportion of candidates study for the National Certificate by open learning; one possible reason for this is the emphasis on the assessment of course work, particularly where practical skills have to be demonstrated.

Flexibility

5.17 An important advantage of the NVQ/SVQ system, reflected in many of the other vocational qualifications in the UK, is the emphasis on the standards of competence achieved, rather than the educational process. This means that students can take as much (or as little) time as they need to reach the required standard.

Section 6 - Progression Routes

Introduction

6.1 Because entry qualifications to courses are rarely mandatory and because some variation in course lengths is often permitted, there are in theory good opportunities for progression and transfer within and between vocational qualifications in the UK. Opportunities for adults wishing to embark on new training programmes are particularly flexible as regards entry qualifications. In practice, as already noted, college course organisation may be rather less flexible than the regulations allow.

6.2 Another potential barrier to progression is that course structures may not be designed to facilitate movement to the next stage. For example, the level of Mathematics is usually restricted to what is essential for the qualification in question; successful candidates wishing to progress may find that their level of mathematical skill is not sufficient to cope with a higher level of qualification. This situation has been highlighted by a recent study for the National Institute of Economic and Social Research comparing the mathematics content of vocational courses in the UK and in France. There is, however, justifiable opposition to making the award of a qualification at one level dependent upon the possession of knowledge or skills which will only be needed at the next level.

Progression upwards within one Award Structure

6.3 One of the intentions of the NVQ/SVQ structure is to allow progression between levels. This is relatively easy between levels 1 and 2 but there are indications that some candidates have difficulty making the transfer from level 2 to level 3. In practice, entry to level 3 may be direct from school (with better academic qualifications) rather than from level 2.

6.4 Outside the NVQ/SVQ framework awarding bodies have their own system of levels through which a candidate can progress. Within the BTEC system, for example, a candidate can move from First awards to National awards and then to Higher National. Many City and Guilds qualification schemes have Part I, Part II and Part III, through all of which the candidates normally progress, and SCOTVEC similarly provides for upward progression.

Progression 'sideways' within one Award Structure

6.5 One of the intended advantages of modular course structure, such as is used in BTEC and NVQs, is that it is easier for candidates to move 'sideways' adding additional modules at the same level. This facility is available to a limited extent within the BTEC course structure, but because the emphasis within BTEC schemes is very often on complete qualifications, college course structures may not in practice allow students to take individual additional modules.

6.6 Within the NVQ structure, each qualification is based on the standards set by the individual lead body and there has been only limited interaction between the lead bodies. Thus the flexibility inherent in the NVQ unit structure has not yet been fully exploited and there are significant overlaps between units devised by different lead bodies. By contrast, the SCOTVEC National Certificate system was planned centrally and common ground between modules relevant to different industries was identified. This ensures that progress 'sideways' can be achieved more easily.

6.7 Since economic pressures forced some rationalisation of college courses in the late 1960s, City and Guilds has normally attempted to identify common ground between courses in closely related areas (for example, between different branches of engineering). Without a fully modular structure, this has had only a limited effect on ease of 'sideways' movement.

Progression to Different Award Structures

6.8 Progression from the awards of one awarding body to those of another is determined largely by the flexibility of the entry qualifications for the second awarding body's qualifications. In general these are quite open.

6.9 BTEC has achieved considerable success in gaining recognition for its National Certificates and Diplomas as a route to university entrance. It has also negotiated acceptance of individual qualifications for exemption from some or all of the requirements of professional body examinations.

6.10 In designing its new 'Advanced' programmes (for Higher National Certificates and Diplomas) SCOTVEC has arranged for links to be established with degree courses. These make it possible for candidates to move from HNCs or HNDs into degree courses and for those who succeed in part of a degree course to gain an HNC or HND.

6.11 By contrast, one of the problems identified in the 1986 Review of Vocational Qualifications was the lack of mutual recognition between the professional bodies, even where their subject matter was very similar. Some progress has been made since then, but more remains to be done.

Transfer to Other Employment

6.12 In the UK it is unusual for a specific qualification to be essential for the practice of an occupation and hence barriers to movement between occupations are not determined by the rules of the relevant qualifications. Where a specific qualification is essential for the exercise of a particular occupation, candidates are not able to transfer into that occupation without gaining the required qualification - this is an unusual situation and where it occurs is normally for safety reasons.

Records of Achievement

6.13 The division of many qualifications into modules or units and the growth in adult updating courses, some of them leading to single subject certificates, has fostered an interest in methods of recording success. Most awarding bodies issue some form of document (variously called 'Record of Achievement', 'Certificate of Achievement' and 'Record of Education and Training') to a candidate who gains one or two units, but not the full qualification.

6.14 There has also been interest in the use of a folder, or other device, to bring together information about all the candidate's achievements including full qualifications, individual units and experience or skills not formally certificated. The National Record of Achievement (NRA), which is administered by NCVQ and SCOTVEC is intended to record formal and informal achievements both in secondary education and in subsequent education and training.

Credit Accumulation and Transfer

6.15 At higher education level the 1980s saw a considerable growth in interest in the concept of credit accumulation and transfer. This relies on the existence of courses divided into modules and allows students to transfer between higher education institutions or from other courses, taking with them 'credit' for their previous achievements. This means that their achievements in previous courses or qualifications are not lost and they can complete the new qualification in a shorter time. The Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) set up a central system for recording the 'credit rating' agreed for large numbers of courses and modules within higher education institutions (particularly polytechnics); this is known as CATS (the Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme). This system will continue, despite the closing down of CNAA.

6.16 In Scotland there is a similar scheme, the Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (SCOTCATS).

6.17 The CATS and SCOTCATS systems provide for recognition of non-university higher education awards as giving credit towards a degree. Credit recognition (at both Higher and National levels) has also been agreed between BTEC and SCOTVEC so as to allow candidates to transfer between the English and Scottish vocational education systems.

Section 7 - Assessment

Introduction

7.1 In the discussion of assessment methods in this section of the paper, use will be made of the definitions of assessment used in the NCVQ database of qualifications. These distinguish the type of assessment method (see paragraph 7.2 below) and also the nature of the organisation setting the assessment:

- *externally set* assessments are those whose content is determined by the awarding body; common examples are written examinations and formal practical tests. Although it is possible for externally set examinations to be marked locally at the college, it is more usual for the candidate's work to be sent to the awarding body for marking

- *internally set* assessments are those which are set locally by the college, training provider or assessment centre; as described later in this section, internally set assessments are almost always subject to some form of supervision by the awarding body.

7.2 The assessment methods most commonly used for vocational qualifications in the UK are:

- written examinations, normally requiring the candidate to write his/her answer but sometimes including multiple choice questions

- practical examinations; this term is being used here to include skills tests and competence tests

- oral examinations

- assignments and projects; these are specially set tasks, not usually attempted under strict examination conditions, requiring the candidate to undertake a realistic work task (for example, write a computer programme to a given specification) or alternatively requiring candidates to undertake a task or investigation which will allow demonstration of the required knowledge and skills

- workplace observation of the candidate's normal work activities

- course work; this can include any written or practical work undertaken by the candidate during his/her course or training programme.

7.3 In recent years there has been some interest in the possibility of computer assisted assessment but as yet very little implementation of this assessment method. Computer assisted assessment may be of one of the following types:

- a method of delivering tests of knowledge, often using multiple-choice questions

- a test of skills, such as keyboarding or database use, which can realistically be undertaken at the keyboard

- a simulation such as a fault-finding exercise where the second stage of the test is dependent on the response which the candidate makes to the first stage

7.4 Work by NCVQ has led to the development of a standard model of 'verification' for local assessments which is gradually being adopted by awarding bodies concerned with NVQs, but is not necessarily followed in all respects by those offering non-NVQs This model provides for 'internal verifiers' who supervise the assessment conducted by assessors within the local centre (college or training provider) ensuring that all assessors are working to the same standards and that adequate records are kept. An 'external verifier' appointed by the awarding body is then responsible for supervising several assessment centres to co-ordinate assessment standards between centres. The guidelines for assessors and verifiers place strong emphasis on the procedures but awarding bodies are increasingly also recognising the need for assessors to discuss actual examples of candidates work to ensure consistency of judgment.

7.5 Of the assessment methods listed in paragraph 7.1 and 7.2, all are theoretically available within all the different types of qualification within the UK but as will be clear from the following paragraphs, some awarding bodies favour one method rather than another. The degree to which the assessment is specific to an individual job rather than to a broad range of occupations depends upon the aim of the qualification and the nature of the syllabus content.

NVQs and SVQs

7.6 Assessment methods within NVQs and SVQs vary across the range and depend both on the nature of the subject matter and level of the qualification and also on the views of the individual awarding and lead body. NVQs and SVQs place a strong emphasis on competence in the workplace and workplace observation is almost always included as one possible assessment method. Most NVQs and SVQs also use other assessment methods, including externally or internally set written examinations, especially at higher levels where underpinning knowledge plays a most important part.

7.7 The intention of NVQ and SVQ assessments is that they should provide evidence of the candidate's competence in all elements within each unit and that the evidence should demonstrate that the candidate has fulfilled all the performance criteria (ie they should be 'criterion referenced'). There may also be requirements within each unit for the candidate to demonstrate his/her skills several times in relation to the different items within the 'range', for example, to demonstrate caring skills with several different types of client. Where it is unrealistic to cover all elements and the whole of the range within workplace assessment 'supplementary evidence' from oral or written questioning is acceptable.

GNVQs

7.8 Assessment methods for GNVQs are still evolving but the Government has decided that they are to include externally set written examinations. Assignment work is also expected for form part of the assessment.

Professional Bodies

7.9 For the qualifications of professional bodies, the emphasis is still very strongly on externally set written examinations but there are some instances where these are combined with other assessment methods such as projects. For some professional qualifications satisfactory completion of a probationary period of supervised work is also a requirement.

Independent Awarding Bodies

7.10 For BTEC qualifications other than NVQs and GNVQs, assessments have traditionally been internally set by the college, under supervision from a BTEC moderator. Although colleges have some freedom to devise their own assessment scheme and to use alternative methods, the usual assessment pattern is a mixture of written examinations set at the end of the course and assignments undertaken during the course.

7.11 As an additional contribution to ensuring consistent assessment standards in different colleges, BTEC makes use of a 'Moderating instrument' which is a specially set external test or assignment taken by candidates across a number of different colleges. The candidates' work is marked centrally and the results of this test are compared with the results of the assessments made by the colleges. Where there appear to be discrepancies (for example, candidates are rated much higher on the college assessment than on the externally set test) additional investigations are undertaken and the college may be advised that their standard of assessment needs to be brought into line with the national average.

7.12 A range of assessment methods are in use by the independent awarding bodies other than BTEC; in general there is much greater emphasis on externally set written examinations than in the NVQ system. In more practical subjects it is common for externally set written examinations to be combined with practical assignments, which may be internally set or may be externally set but internally marked. This was a common pattern in the City and Guilds qualifications now being superseded by NVQs.

7.13 In the pre-NVQ system there were some certificates in which the emphasis was on formal examinations of knowledge but where the certificate was designed to be taken in conjunction with a practical training programme assessed by a different organisation. Examples were City and Guilds qualifications in Engineering and Construction, designed to be taken in conjunction with the training programmes of the Engineering Industry Training Board and Construction Industry Training Board.

7.14 The choice of supplementary assessment methods, such as assignments and oral tests, across the range of qualifications of independent awarding bodies is influenced partly by the nature of the subject matter. For example, some qualifications for senior secretaries involve an interview.

7.15 Between about 1970 and the advent of NVQs, City and Guilds made extensive use of multiple-choice questions for the testing of underpinning knowledge in its qualifications at levels 1 and 2 (UK system). These were normally combined with more practical assignments or tests. The advantage of multiple-choice questions was the greater reliability of the assessment, together with avoidance of the need for candidates to be skilled in essay writing or written communication where this was not regarded as an important part of the skills for the occupation.

Scotland

7.16 The standard pattern in the National Certificate has been for assessment to be set internally by the school or college following a pattern specified by SCOTVEC for the individual module and related to the learning outcomes and performance criteria defined in the module; variations from the standard pattern were however permitted. The National Certificate places particular emphasis on coursework assessment and short tests. With the move to SVQs, more emphasis is being given to the assessment of practical competence using the performance criteria defined in the standards.

7.17 The older style Higher National Certificates and Diplomas were assessed largely by means of end-of-course externally set examinations. In the new modular structure assessment is related to individual modules and is internally set, subject to external verification.

Issues in Assessment

7.18 During the 1960s and 1970s some education and training organisations in the UK took an active interest in improving assessment methodology, drawing on the experience of organisations in the USA. Although much of the 'received wisdom' of the 1960s and 1970s cannot be applied directly to criterion-referenced NVQs and SVQs, it is increasingly being realised that good practice in assessment for these qualifications needs to adapt the lessons learnt in the past.

7.19 Assessment needs to maintain a balance between **validity** (assessing what is most appropriate), **reliability** (consistency of assessment), **cost** and **side effects** and the appropriate balance is often difficult to achieve. Multiple-choice questions can be very reliable, but if used alone may lack validity, because they do not test the ability to **use** knowledge in practical workplace activities. Workplace observation has apparent validity but may omit important aspects of assessment (eg underpinning knowledge) and may be low in reliability. The Employment Department and NCVQ are now promoting discussion and funding work to improve the reliability of workplace observation and other less formal assessment methods, so as to achieve the optimum mix of validity, reliability and cost. It should be noted, however, that externally set written examinations do not necessarily guarantee 'quality' or 'rigour' in assessment - poorly prepared written examinations may lack both validity and reliability.

7.20 Some concern is being expressed about the increase in the number of awarding bodies permitted by the NVQ system and the possibility that some of the newer bodies may lack expertise in assessment. However, NCVQ has a responsibility to ensure that awarding bodies adopt valid and reliable assessment techniques and procedures.

7.21 Another problem to be tackled is that the need to conduct assessments and issue results on each unit can lead to candidates spending an excessive amount of time undergoing assessment.

7.22 NVQ assessments are based on the 'performance criteria' in the standards of competence and results are issued only as Pass or Fail. GNVQs and gSVQs are also 'criterion referenced' but it is expected that GNVQ results will be graded, with superior performances recognised as 'Merit' or 'Distinction'.

Section 8 - Utility and Uses

Introduction

8.1 The United Kingdom has relatively little tradition of requiring specific qualifications for specific jobs. The major areas of exception are:

- qualification of professional bodies (see Section 2 and paragraphs 8.5 to 8.7 below)
- other qualifications which have a legal basis (see Section 2)
- qualifications which are enshrined in industrial agreements; examples are the Agricultural Wages Agreement (which has a statutory basis) and agreements on grading and pay for electricians for the electrical contracting industry.
- commercial pressures related to high-risk situations; for example, pressure from insurance companies ensures that welders working on certain types of work must have a current certificate of competence for the type of welding process they are using.

8.2 In contrast with France, the UK has no tradition of offering increased Social Security benefits to unemployed people who have a specific level of qualification.

NVQs

8.3 The government is promoting the use of NVQs/SVQs rather than more traditional qualifications and they are used, for example, in allocating funding to TECs. They also form the basis of the National Training Targets. Some NVQs and NVQ units, for example those for assessors, are promoted by the requirements of the NVQ system itself and hence are becoming well known within education and training circles.

8.4 In general the UK public is not yet well aware of the existence of NVQs but a national promotion campaign is expected to begin in the Spring of 1993 and lead bodies are being asked to produce plans for implementation of NVQs/SVQs in their sector. However, until this campaign takes effect, it is likely that NVQs will have credibility only in relation to the credibility of the qualifications which they replace.

Professional bodies

8.5 Many of the qualifications of professional bodies, especially those which are long established, have a high credibility. A number of them, especially those which are taken following university degrees, constitute a 'licence to practice'. Examples are qualifications for accountants, auditors and the professions supplementary to medicine.

8.6 The majority of professional bodies have charters or articles of association which allow them to authorise suitably qualified members to use designatory letters - examples are CEng (Chartered Engineer), CPsychol (Chartered Psychologist), ACIB (Associate of the Chartered Institute of Bankers). This practice began with professional bodies at degree or post degree level but is increasingly being extended to those at technician level; examples are EngTech (Engineering Technician) and MSST (Member of the Society of Surveying Technicians).

8.7 Even where specified professional qualifications are not the only route to particular jobs, they often ease the passage of job applicants into relevant employment.

Independent Awarding Bodies

8.8 BTEC qualifications are not normally an essential requirement for specified jobs but the links between some BTEC qualifications and membership of professional bodies serves to increase their status.

8.9 For the majority of other occupations outside the professions, possession of a qualification is a useful aid in job seeking but is rarely essential. At the lowest level qualifications serve mainly as an encouragement to young people to persevere in their studies and as a step on the way to more generally recognised qualifications.

Europe

8.10 The UK is playing its part in discussions with other EC member states on mutual recognition of qualifications across Europe. The Annex to the first EC Directive on the recognition of higher diplomas lists 38 UK professional bodies (eg accountants, bankers, engineers) which are regarded as falling within the scope of the Directive. Work is now in hand to identify qualifications which will fall within the scope of the second Directive.

Section 9 - Statistics and Trends

Introduction

9.1 It is difficult to obtain comprehensive statistics for all aspects of vocational education and training in the UK because of the large number of awarding bodies and the existence of different routes to qualifications. Figures are available for enrolments in further education and higher education institutions, based on statistics collected by the Department for Education, but these do not show the proportion of candidates who were successful in gaining a qualification. They also exclude candidates who studied for their qualifications by other routes. Statistics from individual examining boards show numbers of candidates and numbers gaining a qualification but a complete picture would require collection of statistics from all examining boards, together with an indication of what proportion of candidates come from the further education sector.

9.2 In an attempt to gain a more comprehensive picture of the take up of vocational qualifications, with specific reference to the growth of National Vocational Qualifications, the Employment Department has begun a project entitled the National Vocational Qualifications Information System (NVQIS) to collect information about successful candidates from major examining boards. This will eventually provide detailed information, not only about overall numbers gaining particular qualifications but also the age and gender of candidates and where they studied or trained. The first phase of this project includes qualifications awarded by the six major vocational awarding bodies in England, Wales and Scotland from October 1990 onwards.

9.3 By September 1992 a total of 278000 NVQs had been awarded, over 100000 of them by City and Guilds. Other candidates have gained credit towards an NVQ in the form of individual units. To date the majority of awards have been at levels 1 and 2. Because many NVQs replace existing qualifications it is difficult at this stage to gauge accurately the impact of the NVQ initiative.

Higher education

9.4 Higher education both in universities and former polytechnics has expanded steadily since the 1960s. This is illustrated in Table 1 which shows first year students in universities and other public sector higher education institutions in years from 1965. The conversion of polytechnics into universities and the change to unified funding arrangements for all higher education represented the culmination of government policy of encouraging this growth. However, British policy on university study remains rather different from that in many other European countries. In Britain it is more difficult to gain entry to university, but a high proportion of those who gain entry qualify within the target time (typically 3 or 4 years) which is shorter than in some other EC countries.

Further education enrolments in England and Wales

9.5 Table 2 shows students enrolled in Further Education colleges in years from 1970. The steady growth in student numbers up to 1989 levelled off in 1990-1 but still represents a doubling of numbers since 1975. These figures relate to students on courses running on the annual 'census date' of 1st November. In addition there were 555000 enrolments on short courses which took place during the 1990-91 year but which were not running on 1st November.

9.6 Table 3 shows enrolments in further education colleges in England on 1st November 1990 with a breakdown between age groups and gender and between the major categories of qualifications. This confirms the important role played by BTEC and City and Guilds qualifications within further education.

9.7 Of the almost 2 million enrolments shown in Table 3, a proportion (probably including many of the 'non examinable' enrolments) were on recreation and leisure courses not directly within the definition of vocational education. The boundaries of these categories are slightly blurred, since students may enrol on courses for a variety of reasons and some courses include a mixture of students, some studying for career related reasons and others for leisure.

9.8 Table 4 shows the education of students aged 16 and 17 in schools and full and part time further education in 1990-91. This table, for which the source is the Department for Education, does not include young people in training schemes where there was no release to further education. The proportion of young people in full time education post 16 has been increasing in recent years. In line with government policy the proportion on courses leading to a qualification has also increased.

Candidates and Qualifications

9.9 Table 5 shows registrations on BTEC courses and qualifications awarded during the 1990-91 academic year. It should be noted that there are some factors which make it difficult to compare this information with that in Table 3. In particular, many students on programmes leading to Higher National Certificates and Diplomas would have been in higher education institutions and therefore not included in Table 3. Because National Certificates and Diplomas are normally two year courses, the annual number of new registrations for these courses, as shown by BTEC is approximately half the number of students studying within further education in the year in question.

9.10 Table 5 also shows the number of qualifications awarded by BTEC in 1990-91. It should be noted that in the case of National and Higher National awards these qualifications would have been awarded to candidates whose registration was in an earlier year.

9.11 Since 1983-4 there has been a 37% increase in registrations on BTEC courses.

9.12 Table 6 shows the number of examination or assessment candidates in City and Guilds examinations in 1989-90 together with the number of qualifications or certificates awarded. The 'main series' examinations are those for which there are fixed date externally set examinations on one or more dates in the year. The 'non-series' assessments are those which do not have fixed dates and for which local centres may conduct assessments at any time of the year. Comparison of these figures with the further education enrolments in Table 3 indicates that a significant proportion of City and Guilds candidates prepare for their assessments outside further education colleges. Although some of these candidates would be in Wales and Northern Ireland (not covered in the Department for Education figures) and a small number in Scotland, these areas alone do not account for the difference in candidate numbers.

9.13 Table 7 shows how entries to City and Guilds examinations have increased from 1879 (the first year of operation). During 1991 City and Guilds issued its ten millionth certificate.

9.14 Success rates are difficult to compare because statistics are collected at different times and because candidates may take extra time to achieve a qualification. Available information from the awarding bodies and other sources indicates that between 65 and 70% of candidates who enrol on a BTEC or City & Guilds course achieve a full qualification at the end. Additionally, some candidates receive a 'record of achievement' for partial success.

9.15 Table 8 shows numbers of candidates for the SCOTVEC National Certificate modules during 1990-91. This illustrates the high take-up of National Certificate modules in schools and the relatively low take-up outside formal education. Other information available from SCOTVEC shows that 61% of National Certificate candidates are aged 17 or under

9.16 Table 9 shows candidates for SCOTVEC Higher National Certificates and Diplomas during 1990-91. These figures include both old and new type courses. SCOTVEC has reported that the flexibility of the new system has encouraged an increase in enrolments.

Section 10 - Problems and Issues

The Objectives of RVQ

10.1 The Review of Vocational Qualifications (RVQ) which reported in 1986 argued the need for a revision of the system of vocational qualifications in the UK. One of the aims of this was to achieve an overall increase in participation in vocational education and training.

10.2 The RVQ report recommended the creation of a new system of qualifications which would be:

- clear, coherent and comprehensive
- relevant to the needs of employment
- based on competence and with assessments of practical skills, knowledge and the ability to apply skills and knowledge in practical situations
- comprehensible
- credible
- accessible
- cost effective

The Achievements of the NCVQ System

10.3 As a result of the RVQ report the Government established the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) which was charged with the task of introducing a system to meet these objectives. The declared aim was that qualifications for 80% of the work force up to and including Level 4, should be in place by the end of 1992 and intense activity has been needed to achieve this.

10.4 In assessing the extent to which the objectives have been achieved, the following may reasonably be regarded as achievements of NCVQ to date:

- the establishment of a framework of levels which is becoming increasingly recognised as a workable standard and to which qualifications outside the system can also be equated
- increasing involvement by a range of interested parties which now includes many professional bodies and is expected to facilitate the extension of the framework to Level 5
- a shifting of the emphasis in assessment from the theoretical to the practical demonstration of competence
- the removal of many unnecessary barriers relating, for example, to course entry
- the establishment of the principle that the award of qualifications should be based on the standard achieved rather than on completion of a specified length or type of the course

10.5 It is almost impossible for any system of qualifications to provide a perfect balance between the conflicting requirements and a number of difficulties remain in the NVQ system. Some of these may be regarded as short term problems attributable to the speed with which development has taken place. Others are more fundamental concerns. It should, however, be noted that the Employment Department and NCVQ are increasingly acknowledging the problems and taking action to counteract them.

10.6 The main problem areas are:

- the poor quality of some of the standards on which qualifications are based, leading to difficulties in interpreting what is required and also to inappropriate divisions of qualifications into units.
- a delay in exploiting the potential advantages of the unit system to allow transfer between qualifications and the acquisition of individual new units; this results in part from the duplication and overlap between the units from different lead bodies (less marked in Scotland than in England and Wales)
- a rapid increase in the number of awarding bodies and of qualifications (partly, but only partly, resulting from the co-existence of new and old style qualifications in many occupations)
- uncertainty on how to foster and assess the knowledge and understanding necessary for successful work performance and for subsequent progression
- assessment difficulties including the cost, the amount of paperwork involved, practical difficulties of assessment in the workplace and concerns about the reliability of assessments
- restriction of some lower level qualifications to very narrow skills (GNVQs are partly intended to address this problem but are too new to have established their credibility)
- the absence of clear links between occupational and General NVQs

10.7 It should also be pointed out that a good qualification system is not by itself, sufficient to guarantee an increase in the quantity or quality of vocational education and training. Many other factors need to contribute to this, not least of them adequate funding of the education and training system.

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Table 1 Students enrolled in Higher Education by type of establishment and graduate status from 1965 (First year students, figures in thousands)

	Universities		Public sector higher education			Total
Year	Undergraduate	Post Graduate	Open University	Teacher Training	Other	
1965-6	54	*	*	36	91	181
1970-71	66	25	20	48	116	274
1975-76	79	38	12	42	151	322
1980-81	88	39	14	16	202	361
1985-6	89	50	26	17	251	432
1989-90	107	60	31	19	300	517

Source: HMSO: Education Statistics for the United Kingdom, 1991 Edition

* Figures not available

Note: due to rounding, some rows do not add up to the total shown.

Table 2 Students enrolled in Further Education in England from 1970 (Figures in thousands)

	Full-time and sandwich	Part-time day	Evening	Total long courses
1970-1	144	509	251	904
1975-6	209	445	260	914
1980-1	296	585	573	1455
1985-6	340	650	669	1659
1989-90	377	783	826	1986
1990-1	403	767	793	1964

Source: Department for Education, Statistical Bulletin 17/92 August 1992

Table 3 Further education enrolments in England November 1990: qualification aims, age and gender (Thousands)

	Age 16/17	Age 18/24	Age 25 and over	Age unknown	All ages		
					Men	Women	Total
Qualification aim							
BTEC	125	98	32	2	154	102	256
C&G	129	113	114	6	247	115	362
RSA	19	31	69	4	14	109	123
GCSE	45	45	66	4	59	102	161
A/AS Level	67	67	40	2	73	103	176
Professional qualifications	22	39	62	4	44	82	127
College award	4	13	12	1	11	18	29
Other specified	6	6	6	0	8	10	18
Unspecified - examinable	18	29	64	5	40	76	116
non-examinable	30	65	332	168	206	389	595
All enrolments	465	506	796	196	857	1106	1964

Source: Department for Education Statistical Bulletin 17/92, August 1992

Table 4 Students aged 16 and 17 in school and further education in England, 1990-91 (Thousands)

	Age 16			Age 17		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
In school (full-time)	112	115	226	79	81	160
Full-time further education	59	71	131	50	62	111
Part-time further education	50	30	80	65	35	100
Total further education	109	102	211	114	97	211
Total in further education and school	221	216	437	194	178	371
Total in age group	307	290	597	327	308	635

Source: Department for Education Statistical Bulletin 17/92, August 1992

Table 5 BTEC registrations and qualifications/certificates awarded, 1990-91

Programme of study	Registrations	Qualifications/ certificates awarded
First Certificate/Diploma	50309	33969
National Certificate/Diploma	125287	80564
Higher National Certificate/ Diploma	64851	45013
Continuing Education Certificate/Diploma	7599	5709
Short programme of study	868	*
	248914	**165255**

Source: BTEC Annual Report 1991

*Comparable figures not available

Table 6 City and Guilds examination/assessment entries 1989-90

	Candidates	Qualifications/ Certificates awarded
'Main series' examinations - home	592049	386546
'Non-series' assessments - home (incl HM Forces)	131466	129807
Total - home	**723515**	**516353**
Main series examinations - overseas	47112	23696

Source: City and Guilds of London Institute, Examination Statistics, Home and Overseas 1989-90

Table 7 - Growth in City and Guilds candidate entries and awards for 'Main Series' examinations from 1879

Year	Candidates	Qualifications/Certificates
1879	202	151
1890	6781	3507
1900	15557	8809
1910	26878	15481
1920	12528	7831
1930	18920	11653
1940	20241	13451
1950	75638	47788
1959-60	143661	85698
1969-70	368747	265111
1979-80	461303	323828
1989-90	639161	410242
Total for all years 1879-1990	**1507411 6**	**9710569**

Source: City and Guilds of London Institute, Examination Statistics Home and Overseas 1989-90

Table 8 - SCOTVEC National Certificate

Group	A Candidates Registered			B Modules Studied (excluding withdrawals)		
	88/9	89/90	90/1	88/89	89/90	90/1
Further/ Higher Education	115,308	131,168	121,792	660,699	691,546	660,551
Schools	69,924	94,049	107,572	141,554	201,949	237,326
Other	7,851	11,281	9,226	19,949	27,802	25,699
Total	**193,083**	**236,498**	**238,590**	**822,202**	**921,297**	**923,576**

Source: SCOTVEC Statistical Update June 1992

Table 9 - SCOTVEC Higher Awards 1988-91

	Number of candidates for assessment			Number of qualifications awarded		
	1988-9	1989-90	1990-91	1988-9	1989-90	1990-91
HNC	10180	11182	13627	3827	4109	5332
HND	7230	8723	9725	2244	2323	2607
Post graduate/ post experience	782	965	593	485	654	302
Total	**18192**	**20870**	**23945**	**6556**	**7086**	**8241**

Source: SCOTVEC Statistical Update June 1992

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Annex B - Glossary

Accreditation

The process by which a vocational qualification (qv) awarded by a named awarding body (qv) is given recognition by either the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (England and Wales) or SCOTVEC the Scottish Vocational Education Council (Scotland).

Accrediting body

The organisation which gives recognition to a qualification - ie NCVQ or SCOTVEC.

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)

The process of assembling and evaluating evidence of what an individual has done in the past, whether in formal education or training or work or life experience, in order to provide recognition of this in the form of a qualification, part qualification or accelerated training leading to a qualification.

Assessment

The process by which the candidate's skills and knowledge are evaluated to determine whether he/she should qualify for the award of a certificate. Assessment methods include examinations (qv) and also other means such as observation of the candidate in the workplace and assignments (qv).

Assignment

An assessment method involving specially set tasks, not usually attempted under strict examination conditions, requiring the candidate to undertake a realistic work task (for example, write a computer programme to a given specification) or alternatively requiring candidates to undertake a task or investigation which will allow demonstration of the required knowledge and skills. Compare project (qv).

Award

General term encompassing qualifications, certificates and diplomas.

Awarding body

The organisation which issues the certificate or qualification document (which carries its name) and which guarantees the quality control of the assessment process. As part of this quality control the awarding body may be responsible for setting examinations or may supervise and vet the assessment carried out locally.

Block release

System of part-time education in which the employee is 'released' by the employer to attend college for a period of time ('block'), typically 4 or 6 weeks with 2 blocks per year (compare Day release).

Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC)

One of the major independent awarding bodies (see paragraph 1.36).

Centre (= assessment centre)

The organisation which conducts the assessment (qv). The centre may have some responsibility for the content and form of the assessment or may simply make facilities available for the conduct of an assessment (eg a written examination) set by the awarding body. The centre is often, but not always, the training institution where the candidates trained or studied for the qualification.

Certificate (single subject certificate)

Used in this paper to mean confirmation of possession of a narrower range of knowledge or skill than is confirmed by a qualification - less than that required for competence in an occupation.

City and Guilds of London Institute (CG)

One of the major independent awarding bodies (see paragraph 1.36).

Competence

In the context of NVQs/SVQs, the ability to perform in work roles or jobs to the standards required in employment. Competence frequently requires a combination of skills and knowledge/understanding.

Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA)

Now disbanded, this was the organisation which accredited degrees awarded by the former Polytechnics and some other non-university institutions of Higher Education.

Course

An opportunity to undertake study or training, which may be directed towards a specific qualification. 'Courses' may refer either to individual courses (at a specified training institution, on specified dates) or to the features (length, mode of attendance, subjects of study) shared by all individual courses directed to a specific qualification.

Credit

Attainment in education or training which is short of a full qualification (qv) but counts towards one.

Credit Accumulation

The process by which a candidate may gradually collect 'credits' (eg units) to build up to a full qualification. Sometimes linked with Credit Transfer (see below).

Credit Transfer

A system permitting credit (qv) from one type of qualification or course to be counted as part of the requirements for a different qualification or course. See paragraphs 6.15-6.17.

Criterion-referenced

A criterion-referenced assessment is one in which the candidate's performance is evaluated by reference to predetermined criteria rather than (as in 'norm-referenced' systems) by comparison with other candidates. Any candidate whose performance matches the criteria will pass.

Day Release

System of part-time education in which the employee (usually a young person) is 'released' by the employer to attend college, normally for one day per week. Compare block release (qv).

Diploma

Term used by some awarding bodies to describe some or all of their awards.

Element

In the NVQ system (qv) a subdivision of a unit (qv). An element 'is a description of something which a person who works in a given occupational area should be able to do. It is a description of an action, behaviour or outcome which the person should be able to demonstrate' (NVQ Guide).

Employment Training

In the UK, a government funded scheme to provide training for unemployed adults. Replaced in late 1992 by Training for Work. Compare 'Youth Training' (qv).

Entry requirements

The educational or other requirements (eg. age, health requirements) for entry to courses of education or training leading to the qualification.

Examination

A form of assessment (qv) in which the question(s) or task(s) are predetermined and there is a fixed time limit, strict conditions (eg. no talking or access to reference material) and (usually) a fixed date and time. Examinations may be written, oral or practical.

Further Education

Post-compulsory education which does not take place in a school (qv) but which is not higher education (qv). The new Further Education Funding Councils are concerned with providing funding to corporate institutions which provide Further Education. The types of institution eligible to receive such funding are defined by law.

GCE Advanced (A) level

Examinations taken by students following the more academic route after completion of compulsory education. Normally taken in two or three subjects after two further years of study. Provide the normal route into university education.

GCSE

The main examination at the end of compulsory secondary education (aged 16). Passes at grade C or above in 5 GCSE subjects are normally required for progression to 'A' levels with passes in 4 subjects required for the more vocationally slanted equivalent.

General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs)

Intended to provide a broader education and training than is available through occupational NVQs, with each qualification preparing for a wider range of occupations and placing more emphasis on the understanding of underlying principles. Initially being introduced in full-time post-16 education.

General Scottish Vocational Qualifications (gSVQs)

Scottish equivalent of GNVQs (qv).

Higher education

Education at or near university level or with similar entry requirements.

Higher National Certificate/Diploma

Non-university higher education qualifications awarded in England and Wales by the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) and in Scotland by the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC).

Industrial Training Board (ITB)

Set up by government as the result of the 1964 Industrial Training Act to promote training by levying a financial contribution from companies within a relevant industrial sector and repaying money in the form of grants for training. The system was disbanded for most industries during the 1980s; only three industrial training boards survive.

Industrial Training Organisations (ITO)

These provide a forum for industry based discussions on training matters. Often derived from the former industry training boards (many of them now subdivided into several smaller organisations) but have only voluntary status.

Lead Body

The lead body for an industry is the body designated by the Employment Department to define the standards of competence for the occupation(s) in the industry. May be an existing organisation, such as an ITO. See paragraph 1.10.

Local Enterprise Companies (lecs)

Scottish equivalent of TECs (qv), but with slightly different priorities.

Module

A separately identified subdivision of a qualification - often more or less synonymous with 'unit' (qv).

National Certificate/Diploma

A vocationally-related qualification below university level, awarded in England and Wales by the Business and Technology Educational Council (BTEC). In Scotland National Certificates are awarded by the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC).

National Training Targets

Originally put forward by the Confederation of British Industry and given Government support in early 1992, these provide targets for the percentage of young people and of the total workforce who should achieve NVQ level 2 or 3 (or their equivalent) by the year 2000 and for the annual stages by which this is to be achieved.

National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ)

In England and Wales, the semi-autonomous organisation set up by the government to introduce the NVQ system and to accredit NVQs.

National Vocational Qualification (NVQ)

One of the new qualifications being introduced into England and Wales. An NVQ attests to occupational competence; it must have been accredited by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (qv), must be based on standards of competence (qv) defined by industry and must fulfil certain other criteria.

Occupational Standards Council

An organisation bringing together a number of lead bodies with common interests.

Open Learning

Learning which includes a large measure of self-study, usually based on packages which may be in print or multi-media and may or may not be supported by tutorials.

Performance Criteria

In occupational Standards of Competence and in some qualifications (NVQs, GNVQs, their Scottish equivalents and Scottish National Certificates), the performance criteria define each element (qv) by specifying the standards to which the candidate must perform the element.

Polytechnic

Formerly, an institution of Higher Education offering degrees (accredited by CNAA - qv) and other qualifications with a bias towards the vocational rather than the academic. All Polytechnics have now become Universities.

Profession

In the UK the term profession is narrower than 'occupation' and refers to occupations for which the required education is normally at or equivalent to university level and in which professional standards and conduct are normally regulated by an association of practitioners which may have legal status.

Professional body

The body which sets standards of competence and conduct for a profession. Normally a membership body (see paragraphs 1.13 - 1.14).

Project

An assessment method similar to an assignment (qv) but usually involving a single longer task.

Qualification

See 'Vocational qualification'.

Records of Achievement

A document recording a candidate's skills, knowledge or experience, which might, for example, include success in one or two of the units from a qualification.

Regional Examining Bodies (REBs)

Until the mid-1980s, vocational qualifications were also offered by six Regional Examining Bodies, each concentrating on a region of England or Wales. With the advent of NCVQ the REBs ceased to operate as independent awarding bodies and concluded collaborative arrangements with City and Guilds and/or other organisations.

Regional Advisory Councils (RACs)

Locally based organisations which offer the opportunity for consultation and feedback at local level. They are concerned mainly with further education.

School

An educational institution, not in the further or higher education sector, which provides full-time education for pupils of compulsory school age and up to the age of 19 - covering one or more of the age groups - primary, secondary up to the end of compulsory schooling, secondary 16-19.

Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC)

In Scotland, combines the functions of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (qv) in England and Wales with the functions of an awarding body (qv).

Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ)

The equivalent in Scotland of National Vocational Qualifications (qv) in England and Wales. SVQs are either awarded or accredited by the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC).

Sixth Form College

A type of school, providing for those continuing in education after the end of compulsory schooling (ie age 16 - 19). Main emphasis is on academic qualifications, but vocational qualifications are now being added to the range of options available.

Standards of Competence

The standards of competence devised for an occupation by the lead body (qv) define what a person in that occupation is expected to be able to do, the knowledge and skills required to do it and the 'performance criteria' used to judge whether he/she is doing it satisfactorily. Standards of competence are written in a format defined by Employment Department and NCVQ.

Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs)

In England and Wales, local organisations, including representatives of local business and industry, responsible for promoting vocational education and training and for administering government-funded training programmes such as Youth Training and Training for Work. (The equivalent organisations in Scotland are called local enterprise companies).

Training for Work (TFW)

Government funded programme offering training or community work to unemployed adults. Replaced Employment Training in late 1992.

Training institutions

Colleges and other organisations offering training courses to individuals, including training leading to specified vocational qualifications. May be publicly funded or private.

Training providers

See training institutions.

Unit

In the system of NVQs (qv) and SVQs, a unit is a subdivision of a qualification, capable of separate certification. Units may be taken singly or in combination and may be accumulated over a period of time to build up to a complete qualification.

Verification

System of quality assurance for locally based assessment developed for NVQs and SVQs but similar to earlier systems. Relies on inspection of procedures and sample assessments by a coordinator within the local centre ('internal verification') and by a person nominated by the awarding body ('external verification'). See paragraph 7.4.

Vocational Qualification

The confirmation that an individual has achieved a range of knowledge, skills and competence, representing either the direct requirements of a single occupation or the background to a range of related occupations.

Youth Training

In the UK a government-funded programme to provide training for young people aged 16-19 who are not in full-time education. Training may take place mainly or wholly on the job. The policy is that training should lead to a vocational qualifications at UK Level 2 or above.

CEDEFOP - European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

Systems and procedures of certification of qualifications in the United Kingdom
Guildford Educational Services Ltd
Christine Ward

CEDEFOP panorama

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In these publications the authors, after making brief reference to the characteristics of the general and vocational training systems in their countries, describe all aspects of how qualifications are certified:

- formulation and introduction of certificates, qualifications and diplomas: the relevant institutions, procedures, tripartite or joint consultation or decision-making commissions;
- access to qualifications: conditions, means, motives, channels;
- certification: aims, contents, means, procedures;
- usefulness, use, trends and problems

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